

Dustin Long, *Virginian Pilot*

Congresswoman Betty McCollum's amendment to ban military sponsorship of NASCAR teams suffered a defeat Friday night but she is pressing forward with the amendment.

After a brief period of debate on the amendment, which McCollum introduced Monday, a voice vote was held with the no votes prevailing (check proceedings at 7:27 pm in the running blog). McCollum (D-Minn.), however, "demanded a recorded vote and the Chair postponed further proceedings on the question of adoption of the amendment until a time to be announced," according to the website for the Office of the Clerk for the U.S. House of Representatives.

So, the matter is not dead. In essence, she wants everyone's vote to be recorded publicly instead of hidden behind a voice vote.

In her argument for passage of the amendment, McCollum said: "My amendment ends tens of millions of taxpayers' dollars from being wasted on sponsorship of NASCAR race cars by the Department of Defense. With trillion-dollar deficits, this amendment is where the rubber meets the road for my Republican Tea Party colleagues, who want to cut wasteful spending. We have the Army spending \$7 million for a decal on a racing car. Talk about taxpayer sticker shock.

"For \$7 million, the Army buys a decal on a race car and a few drivers appearances. But it's not only the Army spending millions of dollars, the Air Force sponsors a NASCAR race car and so does the National Guard. And incredibly over the past decade, hundreds of millions of taxpayers' dollars have subsidized race car owners, millionaire drivers in the name of military recruitment.

"Now here's the \$7 million question: Does slapping a sticker on a race car convince a young man or a young woman to volunteer to serve our country in the armed forces? Not according to the Marines Corps. Fact: In 2006, the Marine Corps dropped its sponsorship of NASCAR. A Marine Corp spokesman said, and I quote: "We don't have a tracking mechanism to track how many people contacted because of seeing an advertisement on the hood of a car." A fact: The same year, the Coast Guard dropped a \$5 million NASCAR deal.

"Fact: In 2008, the Navy dropped a NASCAR sponsorship, saying, and I quote from the Navy, "It's not always easy to measure a return on investment. Unbelievably, that year, the Navy also paid one driver, Dale Earnhardt Jr., the outrageous sum of \$800,000 in taxpayer funds, twice the salary of the President of the United States just to make public appearances.

U.S. Rep. Patrick McHenry spoke after McCollum and argued against her, saying: "Let's be clear. This amendment will not save one single dime. My colleague from Minnesota is simply misinformed. Every dime spent in this sponsorship program is measurable. You can measure the number of media impressions you have, which the U.S. Army's participation in NASCAR sponsorship netted it 484 million media impressions, 34 million of which offered specific Army recruiting messages. So let's be very clear. This sponsorship is about recruiting. This amendment is about politics in certain districts for certain groups of people. But the vast majority of NASCAR fans -- 1 out of 5 NASCAR fans -- have served or are currently serving in the U.S.

military. It's a target-rich environment for Army's recruiting message and a target-rich environment for military and the military message. And so I would urge my colleagues to vote against this irresponsible amendment that is certainly politically charged but at the end of the day will not save the taxpayers one single dime."

NASCAR spokesman Ramsey Poston offered a statement on Friday night's action, saying: "Today's voice vote in opposition to McCollum's bill is a demonstration of great support for the military sponsorships of NASCAR."

Among those branches that sponsor NASCAR teams are National Guard (Dale Earnhardt Jr.), U.S. Army (Ryan Newman) and U.S. Air Force (AJ Allmendinger).

Military officials have said in the past that sponsoring cars helps with recruitment.

Bill Harper, chief of staff for Rep. McCollum, didn't buy that debate earlier this week, saying:

"I would challenge the Pentagon to give me one example of someone today in Iraq or Afghanistan who saw the Go Army car going around the race track and that's why they joined the Army," Harper said Tuesday morning. "It may be the reason why they go to Home Depot but not necessarily Afghanistan."